

The Changed One

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>
Poke peered around the corner at the young black boy playing basketball. James Davis was his given name, but Poke knew that this would soon change.

>
That is, of course, if all went according to plan.

>
The fifteen-year old boy shouted good-bye to his friends and started up the street. As James approached Poke, Poke readied himself for the pounce.

>
James turned the corner, and Poke clapped a hand on the young boy's shoulder. Startled, James looked up at the tall, pale, blond man who stood before him.

>
"Do you want to free your mind?" whispered Poke.

>
James hesitated. He was tempted to run, but a nagging voice deep inside him urged him to stay. "Yes," James managed to answer.

>
"Then follow me," Poke said, and he began to walk down the city street.

>
James walked alongside of the strange man and he listened to him speak, although his words meant little to the boy. "The Oracle said you were important, I don't know why. It's been so long since I was trapped like you are! Of course, I was freed by the Changer himself. You'll just have to settle for me, I suppose."

>
After about five minutes of walking, Poke finally stopped in front of an old building that had long since been abandoned. He darted inside; James, bewildered, followed.

>
Poke sat in a large chair and motioned for James to take a seat. He then began to slowly speak.

>
"I am giving you the chance to realize your reality, James. The

world is not as it seems. It's as if a magician was holding his black hat in front of your eyes. Tell me, James, how would you know what light was if you lived in the dark your whole life?

>
"I know that you are frequently in trouble and that you don't consider anyone to be your friend. This is because you don't trust the world you live in, James." Poke held out a red pill. "If you take this pill, you will never return to the place you call home. Your life will be changed in an irreversible way, and not necessarily a good way. But you will know the truth."

>
Stunned, James struggled to think. Somehow, something inside him knew what to do. He grabbed the pill and swallowed it quickly.

>

>ONE MONTH LATER

>Pandora and Atom sat at the table in the ship Rehoboam deep in discussion.

>"Did you hear?" Pandora whispered. "Poke decided to take the kid to the Oracle today."

>"I was wondering when Sour Mouth would finally know his destiny," Atom grumbled. "That kid is the surliest, meanest excuse for a human being I've ever met."

>Pandora hesitated. "He is awful, but Poke said that the Changer --"

>Atom laughed. "Pandora, the Changer could do everything. But I'm sure even he couldn't do anything about -- James." Atom spit out the name. "He hasn't even chosen a name!"

>"Poke told him not to, Atom. Poke said that the Oracle would help him choose."

>Atom shook his head. "We all chose ours as soon as we boarded the Rehoboam! I'm small but hard to break, so I chose Atom."

>Pandora sighed and said, "Yes, and I opened the forbidden box that brought me here. So I'm Pandora."

>"Poke said that the Oracle said that there will come a day in the very near future when people will choose their names before they even know about the Matrix," Atom whispered reverently.

>Pandora frowned. "How?"

>"I don't know."

>Poke walked in at that moment. "Pandora, you're coming with me and James. We're going to see the Oracle. Atom, keep watch."

>Pandora rose and followed Poke to the control room of the Rehoboam. "Hey, operator," Pandora teased Lizard. Whenever someone called Lizard "operator," he felt like he was being left out of the action. Pandora was quite aware of this.

>Lizard grinned and put on his headphones. "Hey, Pluggy," he teased back.

>Pandora smiled. Lizard was from Zion, the only remaining human city. He couldn't enter the Matrix, because he didn't have any plugs. Pandora, on the other hand, did -- so Lizard had a good way to get back at her when she called him "operator."

>Poke and Pandora lay down in their respective stations. Just then, James sauntered in, an irritated expression on his face. "Where are we going again?" he questioned.

>"We're going into the Matrix to see the Oracle," Poke said patiently. Pandora rolled her eyes. James always needed everything explained to him at least five times. It wasn't that he was stupid -- in fact, Pandora was sometimes startled by his intelligence. It was just that James refused to listen.

>"Why?" demanded James.

>"She can tell you things that you don't want to have to find out for yourself," Pandora said. "Now come on."

>James glared at her, but he lay down in his station.

>"Lizard, do your magic," said Poke.

>Five seconds later, they stood in front of the building where the Oracle was. "Pandora, keep watch outside," Poke ordered. He ascended the stairs and opened the door with James tagging along.

>Before long, they were in a room with dozens of children and adolescents. James looked around him in wonder -- they were doing things with their minds! One boy's hands emanated light in colors that changed by the second. A girl made a paper clip chain dance in the air -- just by looking at it.

>"What are they?" he whispered wonderingly.

>"Potentials," replied Poke.

>"Potentially what?"

>"The One."

>Poke's tone of voice sent a chill down James' spine. "What do you mean?" asked James.

>Poke sat down and James sat down beside him. "The Changer freed me. You know that. But you don't know the Changer's real power. When he entered the Matrix, he was . . . invincible." Poke sighed. "He could change the Matrix's programming, its internal structure. He could remake it to fit his own needs. He used to tell me what he saw when he was in the Matrix. 'Just lines and lines of code,' he told me. 'And everything was so plain in front of me, changing something was as simple as dotting an i or crossing a t.'"

>"What happened to him?" James asked.

>Poke put one hand to his head as if in pain. "He was the commander of his own ship, just as I am the commander of the Rehoboam, just as one day you will be the commander of your own ship. One day he made a stop in Zion, and while I and the other crew members got supplies and talked to the citizens, he got in his ship, the Joash, and sped away." A tear slipped down Poke's pale face. "He was going to try to save a girl he knew when he was still in the Matrix. He knew none of us would have approved of it. He went to the fields to find her, and they found him. They blew up the Joash and killed him. He may have been invincible in the Matrix, but . . . in the real world he was as vulnerable as you or I.

>"When he died, I went to the Oracle. I was distraught with grief. She told me that he would be reincarnated in the form of a person who would be born into the Matrix. That person would be known as the One. The One would be able to do everything the Changer had done, and more."

>James broke in, "So what else did the Oracle tell you?"

>"She told me that I would find you, and that you were the key to finding the One." Poke looked at James. "She said to wait until you saw her to pick a name -- she said the name, with you, is everything."

>James was astounded. How could he, James Davis, be of such importance?

>A woman walked in at that moment with an air of dignity and grace. "James, the Oracle will see you."

>James rose unsteadily and followed the woman into what looked like a normal kitchen. The woman departed, and James was left looking at the back of a woman who stood at the sink washing her hands. When she turned around, James was startled. She was black and looked to be about fifty years old, with gray, frizzy hair.

>"Please, have a seat, James." James did as he was told. "I am the Oracle . . . I assume Poke has told you all he knows about the

Changer."

>"He told me what he could do, and how he died. And he told me about the One," James answered.

>The Oracle nodded approvingly. "Then you know that the One has yet to be found." James nodded in assent. "Well, I have some news for you, boy." James waited breathlessly. "You, and you alone, are going to be the person who finds the One."

>James could hardly believe his ears. "Me? I'll find the Changer reincarnate?"

>"Now I didn't say it would be easy," admonished the Oracle. "You'll find him --"

>"So he'll be a man?" interrupted James. He was already trying to make a picture of the One in his mind.

>The Oracle looked annoyed, although James was not clear as to whether she was aggravated at herself for letting a clue slip or at him for interrupting her.

>"Yes. Well, you'll find him, but he won't believe you. You must let him find himself."

>James nodded eagerly. He had a mission now, and he felt touched by something that he never had before.

>"And because the Changer died for love," the Oracle continued, "the One will live for love." James was puzzled by this cryptic remark, but he let it pass. "You know, the Changer came to see me quite often. I still miss the bugger." The Oracle sniffed a little. "It broke my heart when he died. But you might be interested to hear that the Changer actually knew about you."

>James looked at the Oracle's face, searching it as if to find a lie hidden within. "He couldn't have."

>"He did," the Oracle said resolutely. "He told me about it, because he knew I would want to know. He saw you when you were only a child. You were playing in the park. He went over to you and put a hand on your shoulder and said, 'Someday you, too, will change.' Then he walked away."

>Memories came flooding back to James. A tall, dark-haired man with a kind smile and mirrored sunglasses

>The Oracle lit a cigarette and took a puff. "Now, I told Poke to make you wait to choose a name. Do you understand why now?"

>James nodded slowly. "I had to know myself before I could choose a name."

>The Oracle smiled. "The Changer was right. You have changed. Just sitting in this room and learning of your own worth and destiny has changed you. The Changer knew that he would eventually die, but he also knew that he would need to return. And you are the one who will bridge the gap between the Changer and the One. Changed One, your name is Morpheus."

>Morpheus stood and bowed to the Oracle, a newfound sense of gravity overwhelming him. "I'll come visit you again," he said.

>The Oracle smiled. "Whenever you want, Morpheus."

>He left and met up with Poke. Poke looked at him. "Well?"

>An enigmatic smile crept across his face. "I am Morpheus."

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